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THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

A HISTORY OF LOVE¹

BY LAWRENCE GILMAN

THE mystery of love (said a second-rate philosopher in a moment of first-rate inspiration) is greater than the mystery of death. And was it not Pascal who remarked that "*le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas*"? But the mystery of love and the secret processes of the heart hold no forbidding problems for Herr Emil Lucka, the young Viennese philosopher, poet, and mystic whose remarkable book, *Eros*, attempts no less staggering a task than a study of the evolution of human love. He has not essayed, he tells us, a history of love; his book, he explains, is merely a study of "the emotional life of the human race"—only this and nothing more, as the desolate gentleman in "The Raven" observes. That might strike the wayfaring person as by way of being rather a large order. Herr Lucka reminds us here, indeed, a little of the perpetually amazing Richard Strauss—another darer of mighty exploits—who, commenting upon his heaven-storming tone-poem after Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, remarked, with a naïveté as engaging and completely disarming as Herr Lucka's, that he "did not intend to portray Nietzsche's great work musically," but had meant only "to convey an idea of the development of the human race from its origin." As who should say: This little work, ladies and gentlemen, makes no special pretensions; it is merely a portrayal of the cosmos. Herr Lucka recalls to us, also—not in what he professes, but in what he confidently attempts—that classic juvenile who was seen by his mother to be engaged upon a portrait, and who, being questioned, said that he was drawing a picture of God. But nobody, he was told, knows what God looks like. "They will," said he, "when I get through." Well, if we do not know exactly what love is, and the whence

¹ *Eros*. By Emil Lucka (translated by Ellie Schleussner). G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London, 1915.

and the why of it, when Herr Lucka gets through, it will be no fault of his. He tells us that he has not attempted a history of human love; but that, as a matter of fact, is about what he has done.

His thesis is a daring one. It is twofold. While all the world, he says, is content to look upon the sexual impulse as the source of all erotic emotion, and to regard the love of man for woman as nothing more nor less than its exquisite radiation, he holds, on the contrary, that love is completely independent of sexuality. Bound up with this contention, and consequent upon it, is his further belief that the emotion of love, as we know it, is a comparatively modern phenomenon: that love, in our sense of the word, was unknown to the ancients. Those "thoughts that wander through eternity"—as all poets and lovers (and what lover is not a potential poet?) have imagined to be the destiny of the heart's desires—do not persuade Herr Lucka of their timeless origin. Shall not loveliness be loved for ever? asks Euripides in the "Bacchæ." Herr Lucka's answer is that it doubtless will be, but that the human race has been slow in setting about it; and he would not agree, anyway, that Euripides meant what we mean by "love."

Humanity inherited the pairing instinct from the animal world; but to the generations slowly rising from the dark abyss of time to the twilight of the Middle Ages it never occurred that there might be any connection between unpremeditated and cursory indulgence and the birth of a child by a woman of the tribe after what appeared to be an immeasurable lapse of time. They suspected witchcraft in the phenomena of pregnancy and childbirth (to this day, says Herr Lucka, the aborigines of Central and Northern Australia do not realize the connection between the acts of generation and birth). Later, in the countries on the Mediterranean, and in India and Babylonia, we find the first stage of the sexual relationship, irresponsible and promiscuous, modified and in a measure systematized by religion. The vernal festivals in honor of Adonis, Dionysus, Astarte, celebrated the reckless and undirected outpouring of fertility—"man aspired to be no more than the flower which scattered its seed upon the winds." So far, we encounter merely a general, not an individualized, sexual instinct: "*love* did not exist in the old world." Herr Lucka, confronted with the Orpheus legend, admits that we have here a sentiment which is not unlike modern love; but this, he argues, is to be regarded as a divination of something new and strange and miraculous—

"just as we find unmistakable anticipations of Christianity in Plato."

As differentiation progressed, the primitive pairing instinct tended to restrict itself to one representative only of the other sex: a new factor came into the sexual life—the factor of choice; and the history of eroticism enters upon Herr Lucka's second stage. In the beginning of the twelfth century a new and unprecedented emotion—spiritual love of man for woman based upon personality—made its appearance. Woman, once despised—woman, to whom at the Council of Mâcon a soul had been denied—became, now, a queen, a divinity: "a new ideal had been set up, and men worshiped it on bended knees." She shines on us, sang Guinicelli, "as God shines on his angels." We are to remember that men might then have addressed their ladies in the rapturous speech of Shelley:

Belovèd and most beautiful, who wearest
The shadow of that soul by which I live.

The need of a regenerated life was potently astir in all hearts. Men yearned for beauty, for passionate life, unprecedented and glamorous, romantic and exalted. But spiritual love and sexuality were irreconcilable contradistinctions; the man who thought otherwise was regarded as a libertine. As time went on the barrier that was assumed to exist between spiritual love and sensuality became more and more clearly defined. The troubadours were never weary of distinguishing between base love—the *amor mixtus sive communis*, and pure love—the *amor purus*. Indeed, so comfortably separate were the two that Sordello, who sang with impeccable sincerity in the *dolce stil nuovo* of pure and chaste love, yet saw no harm in conferring his favor in a hundred different quarters. Nor is that amiable and inclusive amorist to be accused of hypocrisy or paradox, as Herr Lucka reminds us; in accordance with the tendency of the period, he scrupulously distinguished between sexuality and love.

In the second half of the eighteenth century there appeared—at first tentatively, but gradually acquiring strength and determination—a tendency to discover the sole source of every erotic emotion in the personality of the beloved: a longing no longer to dissociate sexual impulse and spiritual love, but to blend them in a harmonious whole—the "higher synthesis," Herr Lucka calls it, of body and soul. The first signs of this longing became apparent in the period of the French Revo-

lution; it was developed by the Romanticists, and eventuates in the typical form of modern love, with all its incompleteness and inexhausted possibilities. The determining feature of this third stage of eroticism is the complete triumph of love over pleasure, the neutralization of the sexual and the generative by the spiritual and the personal. "It is a characteristic of genuine love," says Herr Lucka, asserting unequivocally his main thesis, "that the physical embrace is of no great importance—does not even rise to full consciousness. The personality of the beloved is everything; physical sensation nothing." "Love," he declares, "is not subject to sexual impulse." If there are some who may be prone to regard Herr Lucka's definition as perhaps unduly generous, we have only to recall to them what the most magnanimous of philosophers said once, in a fabulous past of secure and tranquil happiness. If, he told us, you think or say something that is too beautiful to be true in you, you have but to think or say it to-day, and on the morrow it will be true: "we must try to be more beautiful than ourselves." He might have added—as, indeed, Herr Lucka himself might have said: "Some there are who do thus in beauty love each other."

And now we have traversed—of necessity, hastily and sketchily—Herr Lucka's three stages of erotic history: the first stage, characterized by the unquestioned sway of one of the elements of erotic life, sensual gratification (this stage, observes our philosopher, confidently, "has, of course, never ceased to exist"); the second stage, which exalted those spiritual qualities which were called virtue, purity, kindness, wisdom; and, finally, the third stage, when "the personality of the beloved in its individuality is the only essential, regardless as to whether she be the bringer of weal or woe, whether she be good or evil, beautiful or plain, wise or foolish." In this stage there is no tyranny of man over woman—as in the dark day of unbridled sexuality; no submission of man to woman—as in the medieval day of the worship of the beloved one: "it is the stage of the complete equality of the sexes, a mutual giving and taking."

The definite expression of this third aspect of eroticism Herr Lucka dates from the middle of the eighteenth century, which would make modern love a development of less than two hundred years. He grants that the tension between sexuality and spiritual love had been slackening in the course of the centuries—that sexuality came gradually to seem less diabolical and love less abstractedly spiritual; but the principle

had remained essentially unchanged. Looking away from the past into the future, Herr Lucka envisages a path by which the erotic, as he says, "may travel toward perfection": this is by way of what, borrowing Richard Wagner's phrase, he calls "the Love-Death." The great and rare lover, once he has found his complementary being, is overwhelmed by the will to the perfect realization of his passion—the desire for absolute identity. But it is just in this overwhelming love that the impassable barrier becomes apparent: the lovers are two beings and not one indivisible entity—the fundamental fact of individuality stands between them as the last obstacle to their complete union. "Individuality and the eternal duality of being is felt as a curse—the lovers cannot endure the thought of continuing life as distinct personalities. Inevitably there arises in the soul the desire and the will to escape, together with the beloved, the insufferable solitude of existence; to realize another and higher condition—to become one with the beloved, to transform all human existence into a new divine universal existence." This psychic transcendentalism naturally leads Herr Lucka straight into the arms of the greatest of all amorists, Richard Wagner; and we get a chapter on that master and his psychical evolution, as representing in his works—from the youthful "Die Feen" to "Parsifal"—an immortalization of all the erotic stages through which the race has passed. That Wagner indeed "caught up the whole of love and uttered it" there cannot be much question; he was obsessed by sex throughout his life, and he had a superhuman capacity for expressing, in music of matchless eloquence and intolerable beauty, every aspect of the erotic; so, of course, he serves ideally the illustrative purpose of Herr Lucka. Our historian quotes Schlegel's "Lucinda" in connection with his exposition of the Love-Death: "There—in a transcendental life—our longings may be satisfied." But it is "Tristan und Isolde," naturally, that yields him his richest "case" (as Mr. James would call it). Concerning the profound and subtle concept which is involved in the solution of the psychic *impasse* reached by Wagner in his marvelous song of songs, Herr Lucka writes with sympathy and a measure of understanding. That he fully grasps the vast spiritual implications of Wagner's conception is not evident. In his wonderful masterpiece Wagner touched hands with the ancient sages and mystics of the East, and Herr Lucka cannot quite reach thus far.

One does not read long in this engaging book before per-

ceiving that what Herr Lucka has written is not so much a history of love as a history of *masculine* love; but it is not until we have followed him two-thirds of the way that we come upon an explicit statement that his "three stages" of erotic history apply to the love of man only. "*His feeling alone has a history,*" he tells us. Of the erotic life of woman there is and can be no history. And here our historian is at his most persuasive, his most admirable; here the true and the searching thing is said with penetration, feeling, and simplicity. He shows us that the force which seized, molded, and transformed man had no influence over woman. She is to-day, erotically, what she was at the beginning, pure nature. Her lover has always been everything to her; never merely a means for the gratification of the senses, nor, on the other hand, a higher being whom she worshiped with a purely spiritual adoration; but at all times he possessed her undivided love, unable in its naïve simplicity to differentiate between body and soul. The higher intuition, the object of the supreme erotic yearning of man, for the attainment of which he has struggled for centuries, has always been a matter of course to her. Man's profound dualism is alien to her; her greatness lies in the simplicity and infallibility of her instinct. "She is hardly conscious of the chasm between sexual instinct and personal love . . . the unity of love is a matter of course to her. . . . Psycho-physical unity is the basic characteristic of female eroticism. . . . The primary sexual instinct pervades the whole being; it has been refined and purified without any great fluctuations or changes." It will be seen that in this matter Herr Lucka is likely, as he remarks in his preface, to be called "old-fashioned"; yet perhaps, after all, he sees further—deeper, surely—than those who may call him so. He sides, at all events, with the munificent view of Maurice Maeterlinck, that "women lead us close to the gate of our being."

We have called this a remarkable book. It is remarkable for its courage, its nobility of thought, the sustained height at which the discussion is maintained. Herr Lucka avoids with unfailing tact and extraordinary skill both prudery and commonness; he is neither smug nor salacious, neither squeamish nor unduly anatomical. He handles a difficult and perilous subject with honesty, with calmness, with frankness, with dignity and delicacy, with frequent poetry; and the excellent English translation of Ellie Schleussner preserves admirably these traits. His views are less radically novel than he seems

to think, as those are aware who have been familiar with Henry T. Finck's *Romantic Love and Personal Beauty*, and with Edward Carpenter's *Love's Coming-of-Age*. But for thoroughness, for logic, for sustained elevation, for effectiveness of exposition, this book of Herr Lucka's, so far as we are aware, is unique. To have conceived such a treatment of the subject is a spiritual distinction; to have accomplished it is an intellectual and esthetic achievement of a high order. You would have said that the author needed to be a poet; that he needed to repeat, at the start, the behest of Blake:

Bring me my bow of burning gold;
Bring me my arrows of desire.

Certainly it is a noble ideal which Herr Lucka proposes for that perpetual agonist, erotic man; some may say, perhaps too noble, too exacting—this conception of a love wholly divorced from sexuality. If the vision seems a remote and unattainable one (and even Herr Lucka himself appears to relax at times the intensity of his contemplation of it), at least, as we have indicated, it is compact of very genuine and exalted aspiration. Perhaps what he really means to suggest is what the gentle Irish mystic meant when he told us that

We kiss because God once for beauty
Sought amid a world of dreams.

And who is there among us that would not gladly and peacefully espouse so solacing a conception? Who more eagerly than those for whom, in certain downcast hours, it may have seemed as if all delight and all enchantment were but as "a dream that lingers a moment . . . a breath, a flame in the doorway, a feather in the wind"? Perhaps, after all, our philosopher must be permitted to have the last word; for we fancy we hear him saying to us, with a wiser even than he: Love is more great than we conceive, and death is the keeper of unknown redemptions.

LAWRENCE GILMAN.